



ASTRA

Annual Report 2006

www.astraproject.org.uk

CONTENTS

Copy

SUPPORT



FORWARD

The Astra Project was established in 1997 as a multi-agency approach to the issue of young people who run away. It provides support, advice and information for young people up to 18 years of age who have run away from their family home in Gloucestershire or from a local authority residential unit or foster home.

Astra is a multi-agency partnership between the County Council Children and Young People's Service and the Police Authority as well as District Councils, Connexions and voluntary organisations. The County Council's Youth Service provides lead agency management, support and guidance to the project. Over the last nine years, Astra has not only become a leading example of a truly multi-agency partnership, but has helped other authorities across the country with their work.

In 2002, the Government's Social Exclusion unit published a report on Runaways that listed 23 recommendations to local authorities. Astra, the first of its kind in the country, was on the advisory group to the SEU that established the report and had already been fulfilling many of these recommendations.

Astra also undertakes Family Work, providing additional support to parents and carers that complement the existing services for young people. Once again, Astra has been leading the way in this type of work. Working with the family as well as the young person has been an effective way of helping the situation.

The Youth Service is pleased to be involved in the Astra partnership. The project supports some of the most vulnerable young people in our communities and the continued development of this important work is at the heart of the Youth Service's commitment to meeting the needs of young people in Gloucestershire.

Mike Counsell

Head of Service

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

On the back of the Fred West case, Astra was established 9 years ago as a multi-agency project with the Youth Service, Social Services & Gloucestershire Constabulary. The project is overseen by multi-agency steering group comprising of statutory & voluntary organisations.

Our outreach approach takes services to young people and their families and therefore there are no issues of access for young people living in rural areas of the district.

Almost 1100 young people were referred to the project up to the end of 2005.

The Project workers report a common cycle: Breakdown in relationship of parents, leading to breakdown in relationship between young person and parents, leading to depression and low self-esteem, and leading to parents disapproval of friends and truancy from school.

2005 Countywide Perspective

Of the 308 young people referred;

- 53% were male and 47% were female.

This is not in line with national research and statistics where females tend to run away more than males.

- The ages range from 1 - 17 years.
- 14 - 15 year olds are the predominant age group (45%).

This is in line with national statistics.

- There is a worrying increase of 12 - 13 year olds being referred (27%).
- The predominant group (92%) are of white UK origin.
- 84% came from the Police.
- 20% are Looked After young people.
- There is an increase in Grandparents becoming prime careers (3%).

There is also an increase in out-of-county Looked After young people being referred but this area is out of Astra's remit.

2005 District Perspective

Gloucester

Of the 96 young people referred;

- 59% were male and 41% were female
- 88% were of white UK origin
- 51% were 14-15 years old

Cheltenham

Of the 113 young people referred;

- 52% were male and 48% were female
- 94% were of white UK origin
- 42% were 14-15 years old

Forest of Dean

Of the 44 young people referred;

- 55% were male and 45% were female
- 93% were of white UK origin
- 43% were 14-15 years old

Cotswolds

Of the 5 young people referred;

- 40% were male and 60% were female
- 100% were of white UK origin
- 80% were 15-16 years old

Tewkesbury

Of the 27 young people referred;

- 59% were male and 41% were female
- 100% were of white UK origin
- 30% were 14-15 years old

Stroud and Dursley

Of the 23 young people referred;

- 26% were male and 74% were female
- 96% were of white UK origin
- 57% were 14-15 years old

For more detailed information please look in the individual district breakdown further in this report.

CASE STUDY 1



Yevette aged 15, was referred to the project by her Grandmother who expressed concerns for her Granddaughter staying/running away. The project had previously supported an older sibling so there was already a relationship with the family. Yevette was happy to accept support & engaged well. Yevette had low self-esteem, depression and poor hygiene. Yevette constantly felt tired, as she was not sleeping well due to nightmares from the abuse. Yevette's relationship with her mum was breaking down.

Yevette mixed with a much older peer group than mum deemed un-suitable for her age.

There were historical issues of bullying which led to truancy therefore mum removed her from school to elevate the pressure she felt under. A new school was found & things appeared to be better initially. There were also unresolved issues of sexual abuse. Mum felt unable to cope with outburst from her daughter & needed support from our family worker to work through the issues of conflict that were arising.

Some practical steps taken to resolve some of her anxieties were:

- 1-1 support for young person.
- 1-1 support for mum.
- Yevette was linked in with a CPN to look at the depression
- Bedrooms were moved around so she did not have to sleep in the same room the abuse took place in.
- The hot water in the house was fixed which helped with the personal hygiene issue.
- Additional support from school to catch up on course work & drop certain subjects was implemented.
- Mediation between mum & daughter.

Yevette remains at home and has a good relationship with mum & is seeking employment.

INTRODUCTION

In November 2002 the Governments Social Exclusion Unit published a report on Runaways. Within the report are 23 recommendations to local authorities in responding to the needs of young runaways.

Due to lessons learnt in Gloucestershire we are very conscious of the vulnerability of young people who have run away from home, foster care or a local authority residential unit. In order to respond to this concern, a number of agencies have worked together since 1996 to establish the ASTRA project which aims to provide a safety net for young runaways*.

ASTRA is an acronym for:
Alternative **S**olutions **T**o **R**unning **A**way

Mission Statement

To provide support, advice and information for young people up to 18 years of age who:

- Have run away from their family home in Gloucestershire
- Have run away from local authority residential unit / foster care but their family home is in Gloucestershire.

Family work mission statement

To provide support, advice and information for parents/ careers of young runaways, where:

- The parent/carer lives within Gloucestershire
- They have expressed to Project Workers that they wish to receive a service.

* The term runaway is taken to mean those who have run away either from their family home, foster care or from a local authority accommodation on more than one occasion. We are striving to prevent a pattern of persistent running away from developing.

Vision

Our vision is focused in two directions - recognising the needs of runaways and meeting those needs.

Above all the ASTRA project is committed to creating opportunities for young people to be safe and empowered to feel in control of their own lives and to feel they can influence adults around them. This means access to confidential advice and to an independent advocate, to be listened to and taken seriously and to be provided with practical help, which will enable them to regain some stability in their life and most importantly to live safely.

Additionally, we are seeking to ensure that the needs of young runaways are recognised by professionals, parents and local communities. This means good information has to be gathered by the ASTRA project about where young runaways run from/to, why they run, what would help them to feel there are alternatives to running away etc. Such information is collected through ongoing monitoring of the project's work and other forms of research. This is collected and stored on a database and the results widely publicised.

As part of Astra's commitment to getting the needs of runaways recognised, we have been fortunate to secure funding from the Railway Children until 2009 to continue the development of the service for families of runaways. The Family Support Service commenced in August 2003 with the appointment of Anne Harley, Family Support Worker. Family support is available for anyone caring for a young person who runs away from home in Gloucestershire and it is not necessary for the young person to accept support from the project, in order for support to be offered to parents/careers.

Astra Steering Group

At the time of writing, a multi-agency steering Group comprising of the following representatives whom oversees the work of the ASTRA project.

Lynne Speak - Assistant Head of Gloucestershire County Council Youth Service.

Andy McCullough - Policy Development officer for UK -Railway Children

Chief Inspector Keith Desbois - Gloucestershire Constabulary - Gloucester & Forest Division

Chief Inspector Mark Organ - Gloucestershire Constabulary - Stroud & Cotswolds Division

Cathy Shea - Children's Resource Manager.

Simon Gillings - Team Leader, Training, Accreditation & Inclusion Youth Work Team.

Brian Parker - Director of Young Gloucestershire.

Sue Jackson - Education Welfare.

Francis Gobey - Youth Participation Officer - Gloucester City Council.

Elaine Drew - Connexions Gloucestershire

Terms of Engagement

Each representative on the Steering Group has signed up to a Terms of Engagement document outlining their agency's commitment to, and also expectations of, the ASTRA project. This document is available on request from Hattie Darkin, Project Co-ordinator, who can be contacted on 01452 541599.

Staffing

The project was staffed as follows for the year 2005:

Hattie Darkin - Project Co-ordinator & additional countywide support
Full Time

Jim Twigg - Cheltenham Project support worker
Full Time

Esther Bacon - Countywide Project support worker
Full Time

Rachel Done - Tewks, Cots & Glos Project support worker
Substantial Part-time

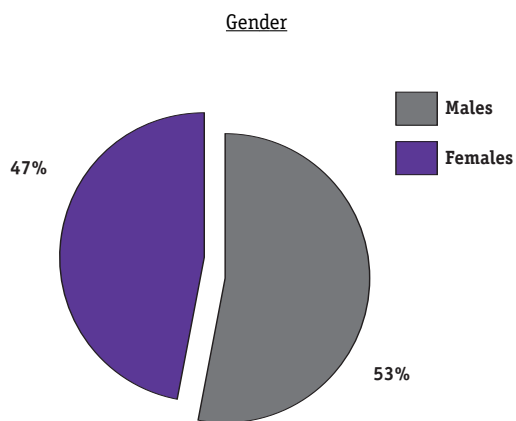
Anne Harley - Countywide Family support worker
Substantial Part-time

The ASTRA Team are based at Chequers Bridge Youth Centre,
Painswick Road Gloucester. (Tel: 01452-541599)

Operational Procedures & Policies

Copies of Operational Procedures and Policies are also available on request from the project Co-ordinator.

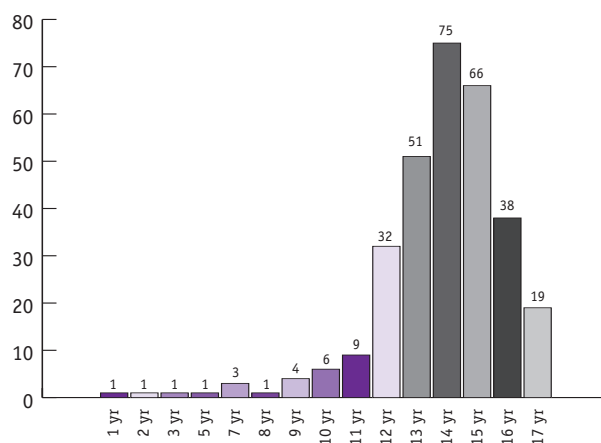
COUNTYWIDE PERSPECTIVE



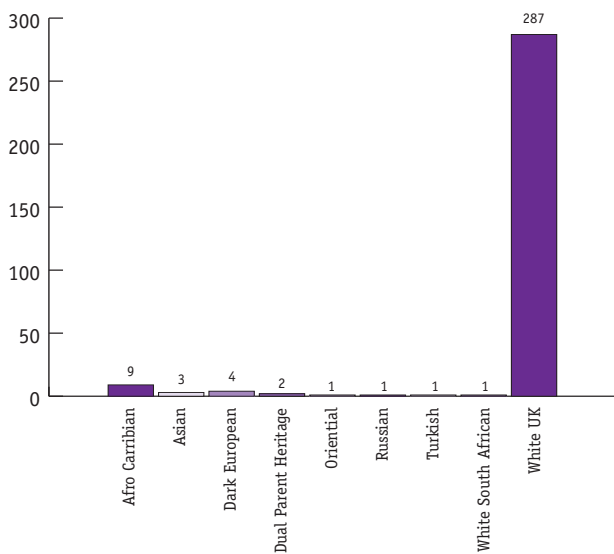
Since the inception of the Astra Project in 1996 we have received 1090 referrals. Across the County in 2005, 308 young people were referred for information, advice & support. There is a higher proportion of males 164 referred to the project than females (144). There is different from previous years and not in line with national research as females tend to runaway more than males.

The majority of young people referred to the project are in the 14-15 year old age bracket, which corresponds to national statistics. However, over the last few years the Project has continued to receive referrals for younger children and this figure is rising in terms of both numbers and lower ages of first incident of running away particularly with the 12 & 13 year old age group.

Referrals by Age



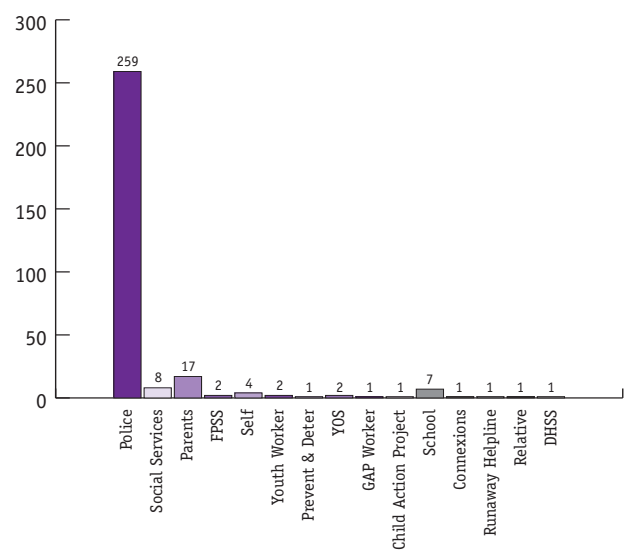
Ethnicity



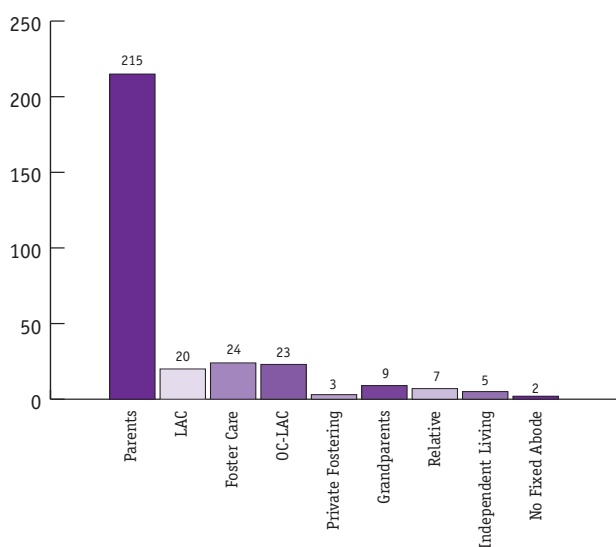
The project continues to receive the majority of referrals for white UK young people; however there have been referrals for young people from various other ethnic backgrounds.

The highest number of referrals were received from the Police (259), as would be expected. However, there has also been an encouraging increase from young people and their parents. The Project has continued to receive referrals from a variety of other Statutory and Voluntary Service as shown below.

Source of Referral



Where Young People End Accommodated



As shown below, the majority of young people who run away from home do remain in the care of their parents or careers. This year there has been an increase in Grandparents becoming primary careers. Additionally, there has been an increase in the numbers of Out of County Looked After Children, which we do not provide a service to.

CASE STUDY 2

// ...the support, intervention and sign posting that the Astra project has carried out has gone a long way in the protection of a very vulnerable young person and we will continue to do so whilst the young person is at risk.

// Rebecca was referred to the project via a police missing persons report. Rebecca started to run away from home when the relationship with her mother broke down and traumas that she had previously experienced began to haunt her. Her father had abused Rebecca for a number of years, until she eventually disclosed at the age of twelve. Following Rebecca's disclosure her father committed suicide leaving Rebecca confused, traumatized and grief stricken.

At the age of fourteen Rebecca had been excluded from school, was persistently running away, abusing drugs and alcohol, engaging in violence and criminal activity, self harming and being exploited by others who prey on vulnerable young people.

Rebecca's family at this time was unable to keep her safe. The project worker allocated to this case befriended Rebecca in order to build her trust, as Rebecca refused to engage with any other agency.

Over a period of six months, the project was able to offer ongoing support at the young persons pace, often just listening and giving advice. The project was able to show the young person support by mediating between herself and social services, securing her safe places to stay and acting as an appropriate adult when she was in police cells or appearing before the courts.

The young persons is currently on the child protection register and the department of social services are aiming to support the young person and her mother in over coming their past traumas and moving on more positively with their lives.

Although Rebecca has a long way to go the project believes that the support, intervention and sign posting that the Astra project has carried out has gone a long way in the protection of a very vulnerable young person and we will continue to do so whilst the young person is at risk.

(The young persons name has been changed in to protect her rights to confidentiality).

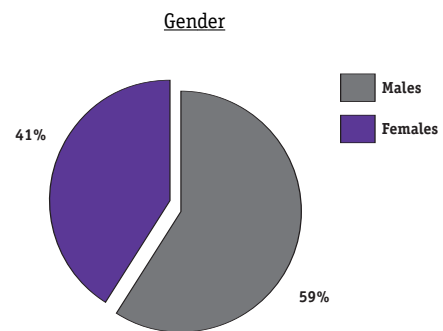
DISTRICT CASE INFORMATION / JANUARY - DECEMBER 2005

This section of the report gives a breakdown of the work in each of the 6 districts.

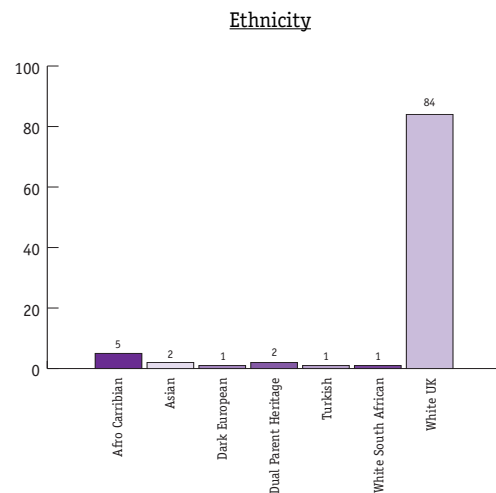
Gloucester

96 young people were referred for information, advice & support. From these referrals, 52 were ongoing where young people were, or are, in regular contact with a project worker.

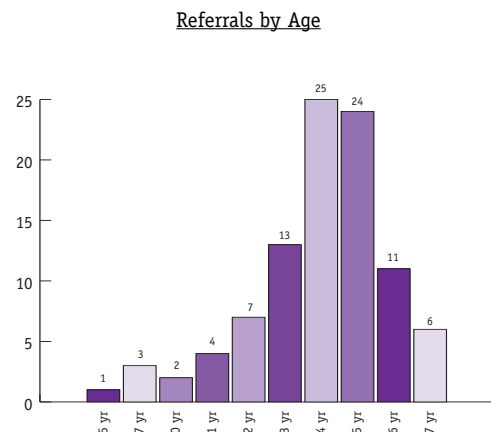
There are a higher proportion of males referred to the project than females. Once again, this is different from previous years and not in line with national research, as females tend to runaway more than males.



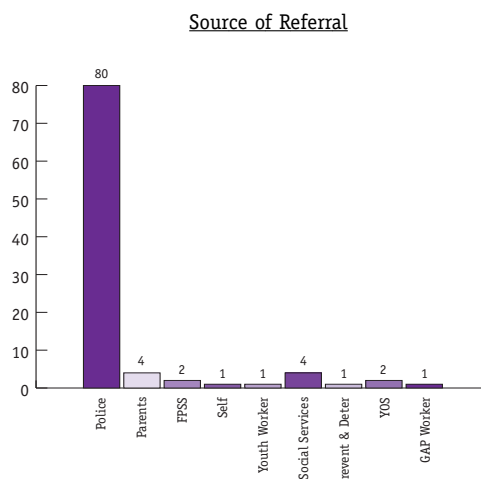
The project continues to receive the majority of referrals for white Uk young people; however there have been referrals for young people from various other ethnic backgrounds.



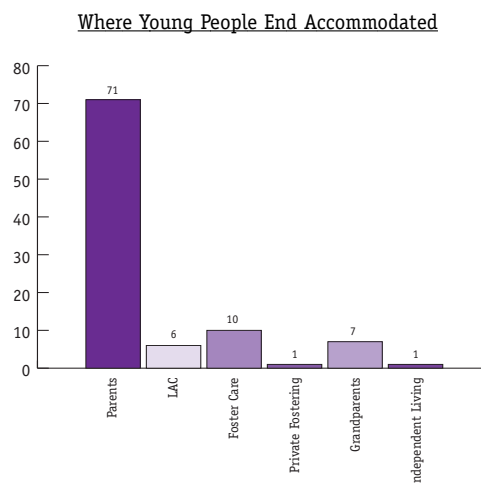
The majority of young people referred to the project are in the 14-15 year old age bracket, which corresponds to national statistics. However, over the last few years the Project has continued to receive referrals for younger children and this figure is rising in terms of both numbers and lower ages of first incident of running away.



The highest numbers of referrals were received from the Police (80). The Project has continued to receive referrals from a variety of other avenues, as shown below.



As shown below, the majority of young people who run away from home do remain in the care of their parents or careers (71). This year has seen an increase in Grandparents becoming primary careers (7).



Areas Young People Live

The highest numbers of referrals, in terms of where young people were living, were in the Tredworth (11), Linden (9), and Gloucester city (10) areas - a pattern similar to that of previous years.

Abbeydale	4	Chequers	3	Innsworth	1	Robinswood	2
Abbeymead	1	Churchdown	4	Kingsholm	3	Sandhurst	1
Apperley	3	Coney Hill	3	Linden	9	Tredworth	11
Ashelworth	1	Gloucester	10	Longlevens	2	Tuffley	6
Barnwood	4	Hardwick	1	Matson	3	Twigworth	1
Barton	5	Hempstead	1	Podsmead	1	White City	4
Brockworth	6	Heartbury	1	Quedgely	5		

Issues reported by young people

During ongoing contact with young people, the information about the issues they have identified for themselves has been collected and is shown below.

The issue reported most widely by young people is the breakdown in their relationship with parents or main carers (71). Other issues, which were highly reported, include truancy (47) parent's disapproval of friends (36) depression and/or low self-esteem (20). The statistics regarding divorce/split parents are quite high, as in previous years.

The Project workers report a common cycle: breakdown in relationship of parents, leading to breakdown in relationship between young person and parents leading to depression and low self-esteem leading to parents disapproval of friends and truancy from school.

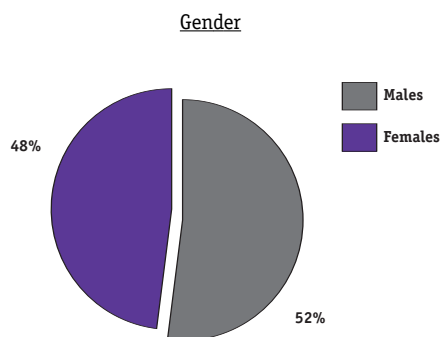
ISSUES EFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Abuse	5	Bereavement	9
Drug Use-YP/Friend	15	Step-family	6
Drug Use-parent/family	6	Not living with biological parents	21
Criminal activity-charged	10	Sexuality Issues	1
Criminal activity-undetected	23	Mental Health Issues	3
Relationship Breakdown	71	Peer Pressure	7
Bullying	6	Self-harming	4
Parents disapproval of friends	36	Domestic violence	5
Depression/low self-esteem	20	Truancy	47
Excluded from school	15	No info	2
Single parent family	6	Stayed away 1 night without consent	11
Divorce/split parents	17	but all ok	

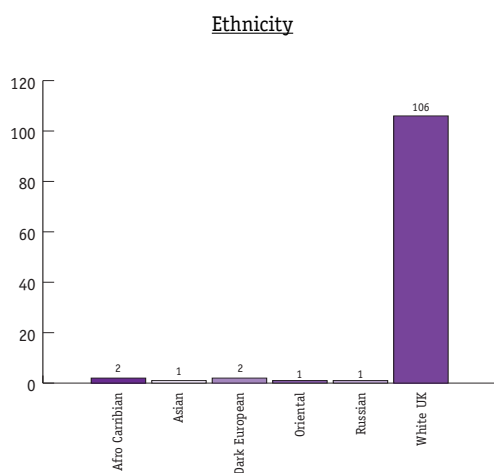
Cheltenham

The Railway Children an International Development Agency, externally fund the Cheltenham district. They have been committed to the project for the last 3 years, both financially and developmentally, and will continue to support the project over the coming years.

113 young people were referred for information, advice & support. From these referrals, 52 were ongoing where young people were, or are, in regular contact with a project worker.

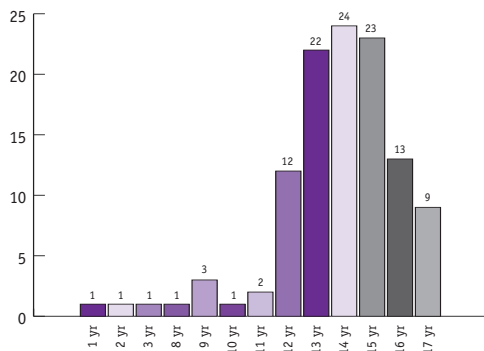


The gender split for males and females is similar to that of Gloucester district. Referrals for males are slightly higher.



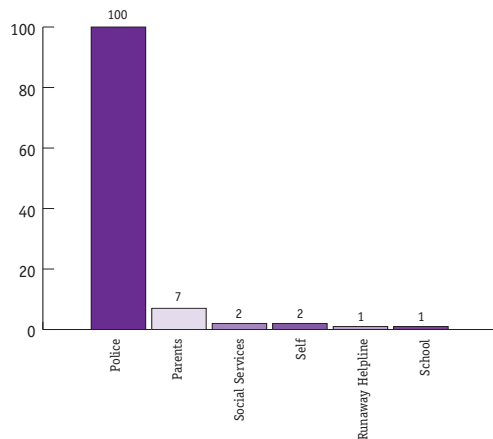
Referrals are predominantly for young people from White UK (106) backgrounds, but some were received for ethnic minority groups (7).

Referrals by Age



The ages of young people being referred are consistent with those of most other Districts, 12-15 years of age, and again show younger children being referred.

Source of Referral



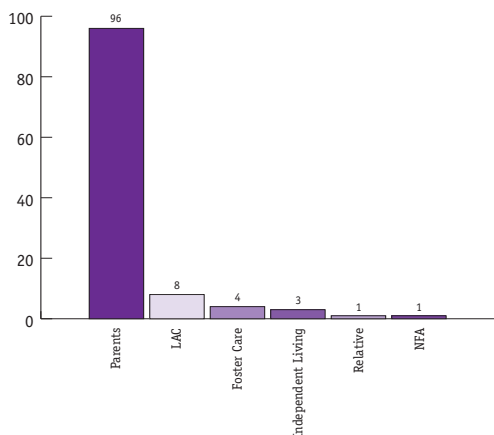
Most referrals were received directly from the Police (100), but there are also other Statutory and Voluntary referrers. There is an increase in parent's (7) seeking assistance for themselves and their son/daughter.

Areas Young People Live

The highest number of referrals, in terms of where young people were living, was in Bishops Cleeve (12) and Hester's Way (11) but referrals were also received for the outlying districts.

Arle	7	Fiddlers Green	1	Princess Elizabeth Way	2	Swindon Village	3
Battledown	1	Hatherley	2	Reddings	1	Warden Hill	1
Benhall	1	Hestersway	11	Rowenfield	6	Whaddon	7
Bishops Cleeve	12	High Street	2	Shurdington	1	Wimchcombe	3
Charlton Kings	3	Lansdown	3	Springbank	2	Wymansbrook	1
Boddington	1	Leckhampton	3	St Mark	1		
Cheltenham	8	Moors	2	St Pauls	8		
Cheltenham Town	6	Prestbury	8	St Peters	1		

Where Young People End Accommodated



Most young people continue to be accommodated in the family home (96). One young person with no fixed abode chose to continue to sofa surf around her varying friends rather than move into independent living space.

Issues reported by young people

Not surprisingly, the issue most widely reported is relationship breakdown with parents (91); this is followed by parent's disapproval of friends (78) & drug use by young people (29). Again, separation and divorce (24), depression/ low self-esteem (27) & truancy (42) all factor highly among young peoples' issues.

ISSUES EFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Abuse	12	Bereavement	2
Drug Use-YP/Friend	29	Step-family	1
Drug Use-parent/family	4	Not living with biological parents	17
Criminal activity-charged	10	Sexuality Issues	0
Criminal activity-undetected	21	Mental Health Issues	2
Relationship Breakdown	91	Peer Pressure	3
Bullying	3	Self-harming	3
Parents disapproval of friends	78	Domestic violence	4
Depression/low self-esteem	27	Truancy	42
Excluded from school	5	No info	3
Single parent family	6	Stayed away 1 night without consent	18
Divorce/split parents	24	but all ok	

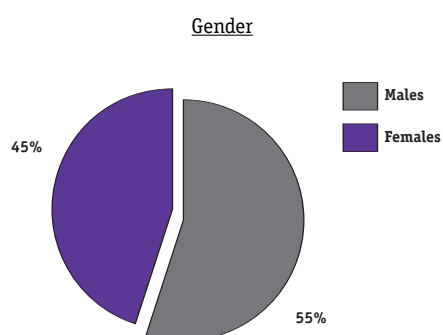
The wealth of data now available in regard to young people who run away is helping researchers and practitioners to develop much better understanding of the root causes of the problem and it typically, although not exclusively, begins with the breakdown in relationships between parents/careers, or "substitute parents"*/careers.

*Substitute parents refer to stepparents and parents' partners.

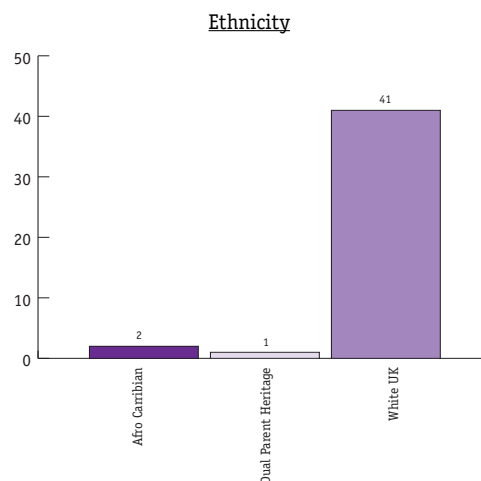
Forest of Dean

44 young people were referred for information, advice & support. From these referrals, 13 were ongoing where young people were, or are, in regular contact with a project worker. Within the Forest district, overall young people have good extended family networks, which are not dispersed across the county/country, as is the case for many young people living in urban areas. However, when young people do seek support from the Project it is generally at a time of acute crisis when all other options have been exhausted and therefore casework tends to be intense and require multi-agency support.

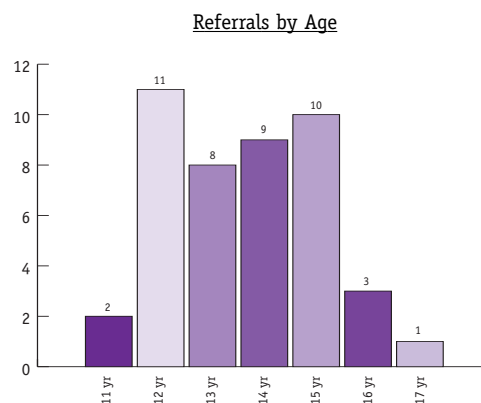
There are a significantly higher proportion of males referred to the project than females, which is not in line with national findings, but follows patterns from the Gloucester & Cheltenham districts.



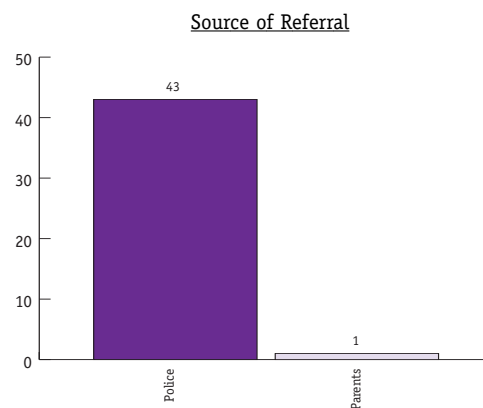
The project continues to receive the majority of referrals for white UK (41) young people. However, in comparison to last year, which was 100% Uk white young people, there have also been referrals for young people from ethnic backgrounds.



The majority of referrals are in the 12-15 year old age group, in line with both other areas of the county showing an increase in the younger age range. However, referrals were also received for 16 and 17 year olds. Last year no referrals were received for this age group. This is due to more established links with housing providers and social services in the area.



The highest number of referrals were received from the Police (43).

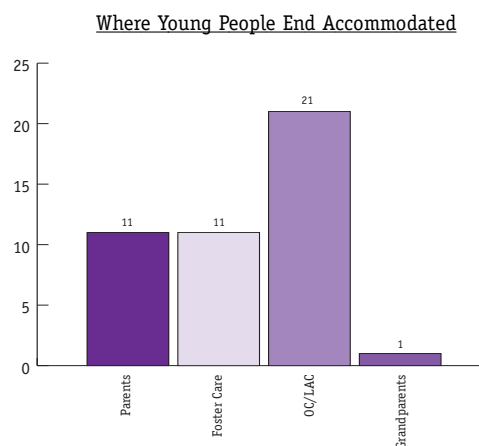


Areas Young People Live

The highest number of referrals, in terms of where young people were living, was in the Newent (11) and Cinderford (6) areas of the forest. The "urban" area of the district. Newent is particularly encouraging, as in previous years very few referrals were received for this area.

Apperley	1	Coleford	3	Lydney	4	Rudford	4
Bream	5	Drybrook	1	Newent	11	Staunton	1
Berry Hill	1	Joys Green	1	Newnham	1	Soudley	3
Cinderford	6	Longhope	1	Ross	1		

The majority of young people who run away do remain in the care of their parents or other main carer(s). Interestingly, the number of young people who are accommodated from out of county is high in this district, in comparison to others. This is due to the location of private residential units for young people. Additionally, there are higher numbers of young people in local authority foster care within this district.



Issues reported by young people

During ongoing contact with young people, the information about the issues they have identified for themselves was collected and is shown below.

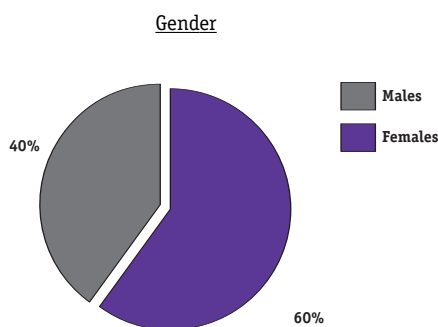
The two issue's reported most widely by young people is the breakdown in their relationship with parents or main careers (21) and parents disapproval of friends (21). Other issues, which were quite highly reported, include truancy (13), depression and/or low self-esteem (11).

ISSUES EFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

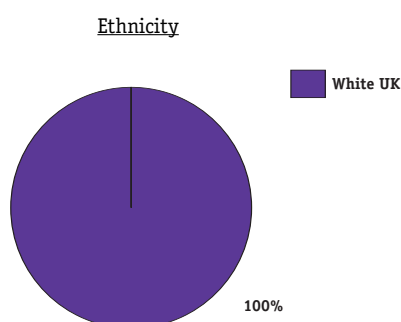
Abuse	5	Bereavement	3
Drug Use-YP/Friend	8	Step-family	0
Drug Use-parent/family	4	Not living with biological parents	34
Criminal activity-charged	0	Sexuality Issues	0
Criminal activity-undetected	9	Mental Health Issues	0
Relationship Breakdown	21	Peer Pressure	1
Bullying	3	Self-harming	0
Parents disapproval of friends	21	Domestic violence	0
Depression/low self-esteem	11	Truancy	13
Excluded from school	1	No info	21
Single parent family	0	Stayed away 1 night without consent but all ok	0
Divorce/split parents	6		

Cotswold District

5 young people were referred for information, advice & support. From these referrals, 3 were ongoing where young people were, or are, in regular contact with a project worker.

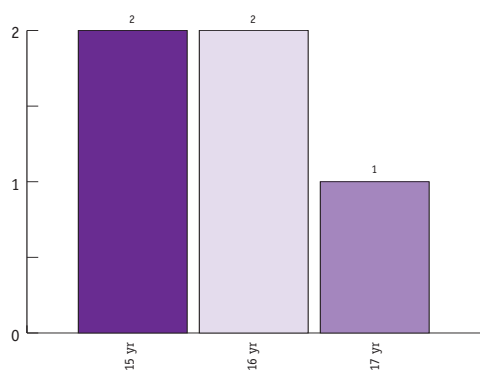


There are a third more females referred to the project than males, which is the highest across the districts and higher than the national average.



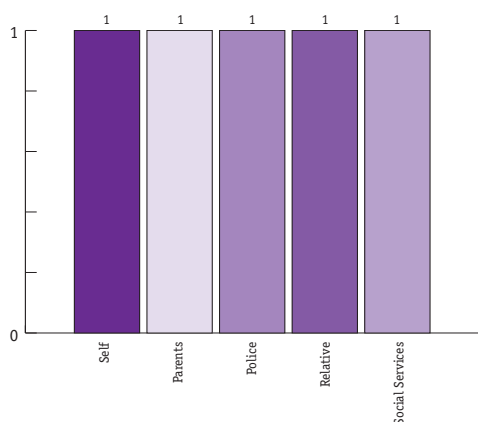
All of the referrals are for young people with an ethnic background of White UK.

Referrals by Age



The majority of referrals were for 15-16 year olds, which, again supports the national findings.

Source of Referral



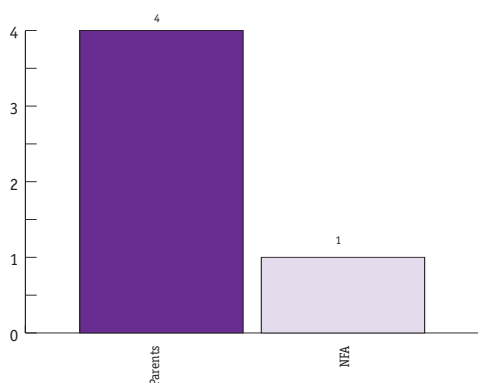
The sources of referrals overall are less wide ranging than was received last year. However, referrals from parents and young people themselves have both increased, as in other districts, suggesting that Astra is now more widely known about amongst local populations.

Areas Young People Live

The highest number of referrals, in terms of where young people were living, was in Cirencester - the "urban" area of the (rural) district, as is the case in the Forest of Dean. Referrals were also received for another two areas of the District, which gives Project Workers an opportunity to establish new networks within the District.

Cirencester 3 Morton-in-Marsh 1 Chipping Camden 1

Where Young People End Accommodated



Again, the majority of young people who run away do remain in the care of their parents or other main carer(s). With the exception of one young woman who did not want accommodation out of the area and chose to sofa surf amongst her friends but was left with information on where to go for additional support.

Issues reported by young people

As in the other Districts, the information about the issues young people have identified for themselves has been collected and is shown below. Again, the issue reported most widely by young people is the breakdown in their relationship with parents or main careers (5). Other issues, which were commonly reported, include depression and/or low self-esteem (4), parent's disapproval of friends (4). The statistics regarding divorce/split parents are quite high (3).

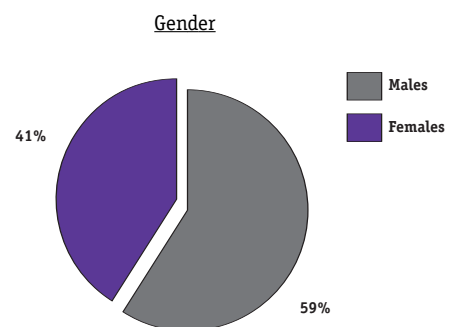
ISSUES EFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Abuse	0	Bereavement	1
Drug Use-YP/Friend	1	Step-family	1
Drug Use-parent/family	0	Not living with biological parents	1
Criminal activity-charged	0	Sexuality Issues	0
Criminal activity-undetected	0	Mental Health Issues	0
Relationship Breakdown	5	Peer Pressure	0
Bullying	0	Self-harming	0
Parents disapproval of friends	4	Domestic violence	1
Depression/low self-esteem	3	Truancy	1
Excluded from school	0	No info	0
Single parent family	0	Stayed away 1 night without consent	0
Divorce/split parents	3	but all ok	0

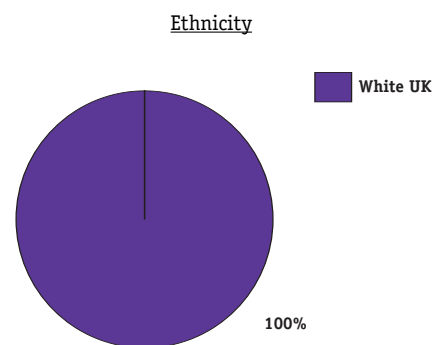
Tewkesbury District

27 young people were referred for information, advice & support. From these referrals, 10 were ongoing where young people were, or are, in regular contact with a project worker.

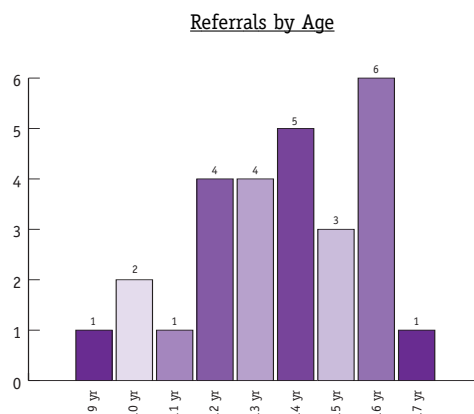
Like other Districts, in Tewkesbury the referrals in terms of gender balance were higher for males than for females. However, it should be noted that for Project Workers convenience, Churchdown and Brockworth cases are recorded as Gloucester cases and that could affect the gender balance displayed within the district.



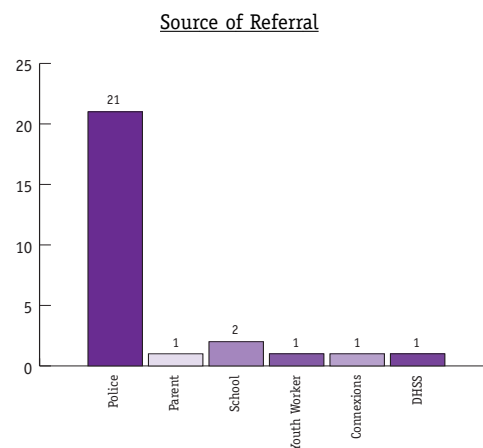
The project continues to receive the majority of referrals for white UK young people.



The majority of young people referred to the project are in the 14 & 16-year-old age bracket, which corresponds to national statistics. However, over the last few years the Project has continued to receive referrals for younger children and this figure is rising in terms of both numbers and lower ages of first incident of running away particularly with the 12 year old age group.



The highest numbers of referrals were received from the Police (21). There is also a spread of referrals from other sources.

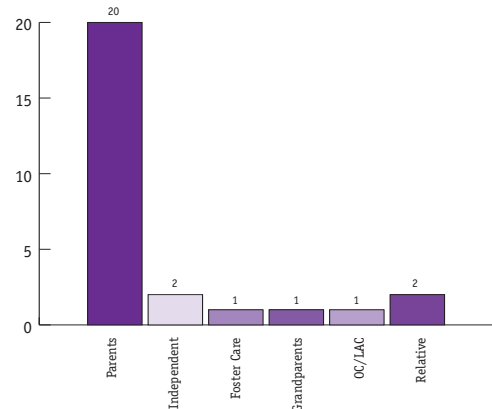


Areas Young People Live

The highest number of referrals, in terms of where young people were living, was in Tewkesbury (11) itself - again, the "urban" area of the (rural) district, as is the case in other rural Districts of the County. However, there has been an increase in the Northway (6) area of the district.

Ashchurch	1	Milton	1	Teddington	1	Walton Cardiff	3
Aston Cross	1	Northway	6	Tewkesbury	11		
Bishops Cleeve	1	Priors Park	1	Twynning	1		

Where Young People End Accommodated



Again, the majority of young people who run away do remain in the care of their parents or other main carer(s) (20).

Issues reported by young people

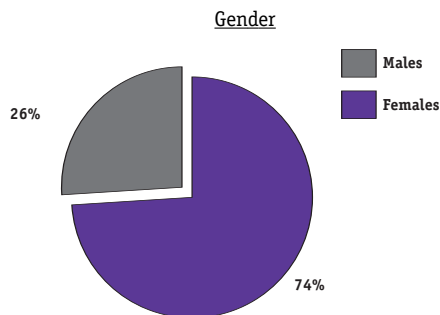
The issues young people have identified are shown below. Again, the findings echo those of the other Districts. Most widely reported by young people is breakdown in the relationship with their parents/main careers (21). When Project workers explore this at a deeper level with young people, they find other significant issues to be divorce/ separation between parents/main careers (7). Again, parent's disapproval of friends (16), truancy (7), depression and/or low self-esteem (5), all factor, as highlighted in the other Districts.

ISSUES EFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

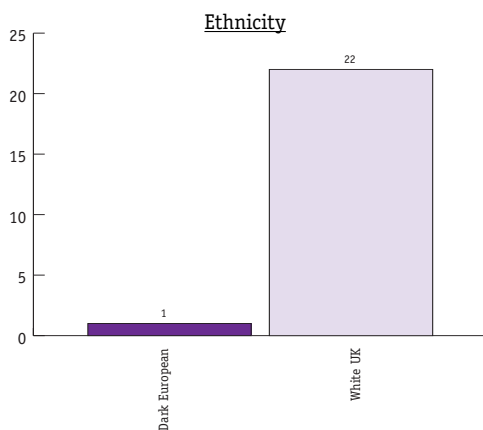
Abuse	2	Bereavement	0
Drug Use-YP/Friend	4	Step-family	1
Drug Use-parent/family	0	Not living with biological parents	7
Criminal activity-charged	1	Sexuality Issues	0
Criminal activity-undetected	4	Mental Health Issues	1
Relationship Breakdown	21	Peer Pressure	1
Bullying	1	Self-harming	2
Parents disapproval of friends	16	Domestic violence	2
Depression/low self-esteem	5	Truancy	7
Excluded from school	2	No info	2
Single parent family	1	Stayed away 1 night without consent but all ok	2
Divorce/split parents	7		

Stroud and Dursley District

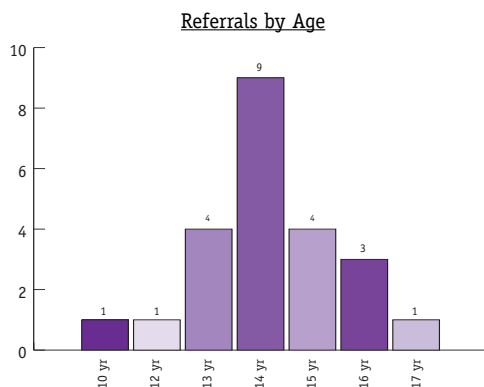
23 young people were referred for information, advice & support. From these referrals, 13 were ongoing where young people were, or are, in regular contact with a project worker.



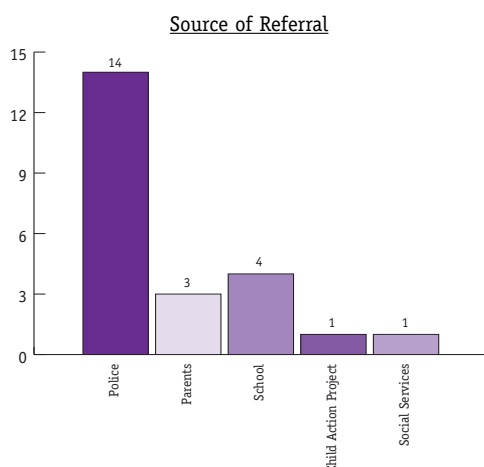
There are a higher proportion of females referred to the project than males, which fits with national findings.



Referrals are predominantly for young people from White UK backgrounds (22).



The majority of young people referred to the project are in the 13-15 year old age bracket, which corresponds to national statistics. However, over the last few years the Project has continued to receive referrals for younger children and this figure is rising in terms of both numbers and lower ages of first incident of running away.



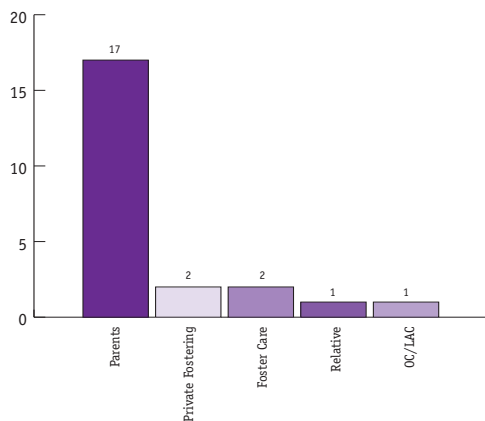
14 of referrals were received directly from the Police. There is a range of referrals from other sources, with an increase from parents and schools, which indicate that the network in this area has been further developed.

Areas where young people live

As expected, the highest numbers of referrals are for young people living in the main town of Stroud - the "urban" area of the (rural) district. However, there are also a number of other areas, which feature this year where referrals were not received last year.

Box	1	Hillesley	1	Stroud	12
Brimscombe	2	Nailsworth	1	Whiteshill	1
Dursley	2	Stonehouse	2	Wotton-Under-Edge	1

Where Young People End Accommodated



Accommodation of young people

A high number of young people in this District remain in their family homes. However, there are also a number of young people being accommodated in private fostering arrangements & Local Authority foster care.

Issues identified by young people

Not surprisingly, the issue most widely reported is relationship breakdown with parents (18). Again, separation and divorce (8), depression/ low self-esteem (7), parent's disapproval of friends (10) and truancy (9) all factor highly among young peoples issues. In Stroud and Dursley, however, there is an increase of young people reporting self-harm and drug use as issues for themselves.

ISSUES EFFECTING YOUNG PEOPLE

Abuse	1	Bereavement	0
Drug Use-YP/Friend	5	Step-family	2
Drug Use-parent/family	0	Not living with biological parents	6
Criminal activity-charged	2	Sexuality Issues	0
Criminal activity-undetected	0	Mental Health Issues	1
Relationship Breakdown	18	Peer Pressure	1
Bullying	3	Self-harming	4
Parents disapproval of friends	10	Domestic violence	2
Depression/low self-esteem	7	Truancy	9
Excluded from school	2	No info	2
Single parent family	2	Stayed away 1 night without consent	3
Divorce/split parents	8	but all ok	

FAMILY WORK REPORT 2005

2005 was the second full year of Family Support being available through the project. During the year, 69 families were referred to the Family Worker of which 64 accepted the service. This figure shows an increase of 72.5% on referrals received during 2004. Referrals were received from all districts, but Gloucester made up 45 % of referrals.

Fig. 1 - Referrals for family support

The level of support required varied widely, from parents for whom telephone support was sufficient, to families who required regular meetings over a number of months.

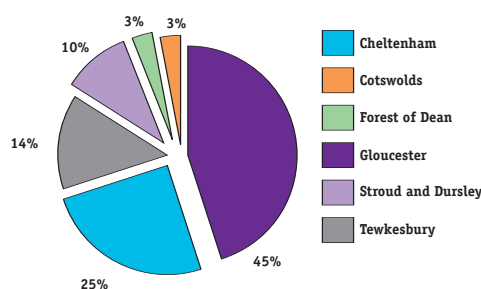


Fig. 2 - Level of support

The type of support required varied. Most of the parents/careers need help to review their parenting strategies, and benefited from the advice and support of the Family Support Worker. Issues around control and boundaries were frequent themes, and many parents seized on advice on assertive parenting as a golden nugget.

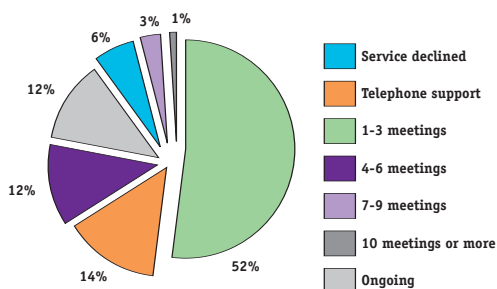
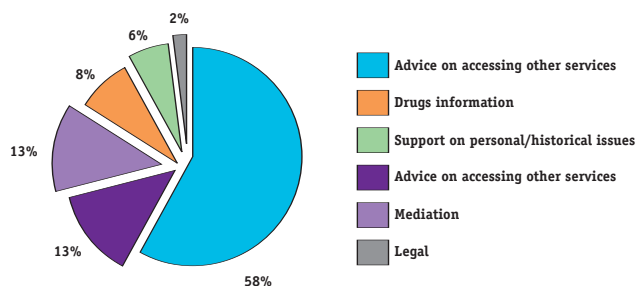


Fig.3 - Type of Support

Many parents were concerned about drug abuse by their sons/daughters or their friends. The family worker was able to provide information on drugs and to signpost them to other sources of information and advice. In many cases, young people had access to cannabis, alcohol and tobacco. The incidence of "hard drugs" (Class A) use amongst the families referred to the family worker was low.



A number of families were having difficulty in accessing other sources of help and support. The Family Worker was able to assist by helping them identify which sources of support would be the most helpful and to support any applications or referrals that were needed to be made. On some occasions, the Family Worker would accompany parents to meetings at school, with social services or other sources of help and support, to enable parents to access what they needed.

Mediation has proved to be a useful tool for resolving conflict and differences with the family. The project has developed two distinct types of mediation - family contracting and solution focused mediation.

In family contracting, the family negotiate an agreement that puts into place a means of coping with a conflict situation. The family agree what each member will (or will not) do in certain situations. The family are encouraged to make concessions to each other and find a middle way through their difficulties. It is emphasised from the start that no one will get everything they want, but hopefully, everyone will get enough to make life tolerable for all family members.

Some families are too entrenched in their patterns of behaviour, or the areas of conflict are too numerous, for a family contract to be reached. The project has therefore recently introduced solution-focused mediation. This concentrates on the best hopes of each member of the family and in identifying the resources that the family has for achieving them. This useful tool is derived from Solution Focused Brief Therapy. This form of mediation is becoming the method of choice for the project and 8 families took advantage of the mediation service during 2005.

Families are often unsure about many areas of family law, and often ask questions like:

Does an unmarried father have the right to parental responsibility?

To what age am I responsible for my child?

Can I call the police if she smashed up my home?

Can I refuse to have him in the house?

Some questions, such as these, the Family worker can answer. Sometimes they are more complex and the worker will then signpost the family to a suitable place where these questions can be answered, e.g. a solicitor or Citizens Advice Bureaux.

Families presented with a wide range of issues, and often displayed a complex mixture of issues, which were impacting on the young person and their behaviour. In a number of cases, families were struggling with issues from the past, which impacted on, and compounded, their current difficulties. Issues such as past domestic violence, past abuse and relationships with absent parents cast a shadow over a number of families, and parents appreciated support from the Family Support worker on these issues. Once again, enabling parents to access sources of longer-term support was appreciated by a number of families, particularly those who were struggling as lone parents.

CASE STUDY JULIA

Support was offered to the family friends and to Dad and his wife, and after a month or so, Julia decided that she would like to return to Dad's. Following her return to her Dad's the situation stabilised.

Julia's mum and dad had split up when she was about 10. As mum and dad and their new partners lived quite close to one another, Julia had good access to both parents, but lived most of the time at Dad's.

Things began to go wrong when Mum decided to get married again. Julia had been going through the usual teenage ups and downs with Dad; staying out late, boyfriends etc. but when Mum announced her wedding plans, Julia decided to leave Dad's and move in with Mum.

The relationship between Mum and Julia had never been that good, and now things deteriorated rapidly, with Julia becoming aggressive and verbally abusive both to mum and her new partner. She began to go out in the early hours of the morning, with no one being quite sure where she was or who she was with, and they were concerned about her safety. She also began to refuse to go to school.

The project became involved after Julia was reported missing to the police. After meeting with Julia, the project worker offered family support to Mum. Mum found it difficult to keep appointments, citing other commitments, and often cancelled appointments at the last minute. Julia was similarly inconsistent with her meetings with the project worker.

Contact was lost with the family for a few months, until a friend of the family contacted the project asking for help. The friend and his wife had been trying to encourage Julia to return to school by escorting her in the mornings and then picking her up at lunch time, then returning her for the afternoon session. They were concerned that the situation at Mum's was now critical, and asked the project for help and advice.

Social services became involved at this point, and a joint meeting was held between Mum and her new husband, Dad and his wife, the family friends and both the social worker and the family support worker. Support was offered to the family friends and to Dad and his wife, and after a month or so, Julia decided that she would like to return to Dad's. Following her return to her Dad's the situation stabilised.

THE MULTI-AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

CAMHS cannot value too highly the support we have from Astra in working with often very troubled young people. We see Astra as a vital part of the supportive network of agencies working for the well being of the county's young people.

CAMHS Worker

Astra have been a very positive influence for one of the young people on my caseload. The project worker has been extremely supportive and has been holding the case together, arranging meetings, appointments etc beyond her role.

CIN Team

Fantastic! Accessing Astra, as a professional agency is easy, quick and efficient and you're given a prompt response. In my experience and from feedback from others Astra are friendly, professional and easy to access whether you're a parent, young person or other agency.

Astra is young person focused. They are excellent at information sharing, working alongside other agencies and keeping relevant people informed of anything from progress to concerns.

YOS Worker

PARENT & YOUNG PERSON PERSPECTIVE

Astra is a brilliant project it has helped me to know who I really am and how I can help myself.

Young Person

Astra listened and help sort things out with my dad.

Young Person

Astra have been the only organisation to listen & take me seriously. They have offered me support when I am at the end of my tether with my daughter and not sure which way to turn. Thank you and keep up the good work.

Parent

I found Astra to be a lifesaver. It's a frightening situation for parents to be in and its great to have someone who says, "I can help".

Parent

DRAMA RESIDENTIAL

In January this year a young person and myself (Esther Bacon) spent a weekend on a drama residential at the Wilderness centre in the Forest of Dean.



The weekend was packed with drama activities that explored the use of comedy, games and acting/directing skills. There was a mixture of adults and young people working together over the whole weekend, sharing ideas as well as having tons of fun!

The young person I took on the residential was an ex-runaway and was interested in using the weekend to gain more skills in drama. She would then hopefully use what she had learnt to help deliver peer education work for the Astra Project in the future.

The feedback from the young person was very positive. She enjoyed meeting new people and being taught by professional actors and directors. I also found the weekend very valuable as I gained more contacts and also developed my own drama skills for when I work with young people.



FUNDING

The project continues to be core funded by the County Council Youth Service, Social Services Gloucestershire Constabulary. Additionally, The Railway Children contribute a substantial amount of funding to the project with a further commitment of £136,517 over the next 3 years.

Income 2005-2006		Expenditure 2005-2006	
Youth Service	£26,000	Staffing Costs (Inc Travel Costs)	£108,112.73
Social Services	£26,000	Rent	£2,000
Gloucestershire Constabulary	£26,000	Office Expenses	£3,072
Railway Children Cheltenham	£22,810	Recruitment	£2,000
Railway Children Family Worker	£15,270	Printing & Publicity	£2,929.29
Stroud District Council	£3,300	Carry Forward (RC-Monies)	£1,265.98
Totals	£119,380	Totals	£119,380

NATIONAL WORK

Runaways Helpline

In 2003 the Astra Project approached the National Missing Persons "Message Home Service" who are now part of The Runaways Helpline. We began to work in partnership to pilot an out of hour's service for young runaways in Gloucester. Due to the success of the pilot we have, over the last 3 years, diverted all of Astra's phones to the Helpline after 5pm and over the weekends.



This has been very beneficial because when young people call out of hours they do not get an answer machine but an appropriate adult to talk to. During this 3-year period Astra has been contacted in a consultative capacity by other projects working with runaways to discuss the logistics of diverting their phones to the helpline.

In addition, Astra became part of an advisory group to support the Runaway Helpline. We are now in discussion on establishing a national coalition of projects to work together to ensure the needs of young runaways continue to be recognised by professionals and policy makers.

Safe and Sound

On May 19th 2005 the Astra Project was invited as guest speaker to a national conference, "Safe and sound" working with Young Runways, which was held in London and organised by The Children's Society.

Astra's role was to share our practice of working with the families of young runaways. This is a recent development into the phenomenon of the work with runaways, which it is anticipated will further refine Astra's knowledge about effective ways of reducing the risks for young people and furthermore, and most importantly, keep them safe.

Corporate Sponsors

On November the 16th Astra attended a conference in Bognor Regis for the Railway Children's corporate sponsors SSP.

Sarah, aged 17 years old, spoke to a packed audience of over 400 delegates at the conference about her experiences of why she ran away and the risks she had taken whilst away from her family home. Additionally, Sarah explained how the project had been able to help support her and her mother to deal with their issues in an alternative way to which they previously tried to resolve them.



This had a very positive impact, both on Sarah and the delegates of the conference. Sarah's self esteem increased tenfold and the delegates felt she was a real person and not someone they had read about. This gave them the incentive to go out and raise more monies for the work of the Railway Children.

L'Europe de l'Enfance

On November 29th the Astra Project was invited by the UK presidency of the EU to a "meeting of the Permanent Intergovernmental Group "L'EUROPE DE L'ENFANCE". We delivered a workshop on "securing better outcomes for children and young people through integrated services" for delegates from European countries.

The workshops were divided loosely in line with outcome areas of the Every Child Matters, health, safety, enjoying and achieving, making a positive contribution and achieve economic well-being.

Astra's contribution was to deliver a workshop on the outcome area of safety. Additionally we decided to try something different and we had a young person and her parent attend the conference with us so they could share their own experiences of the services they received from the Astra project. The feedback from delegates was very positive and they felt very privileged to speak to some of our service users.

Gloucester University Seminar

On 14th of December 2005, Astra contributed to the programme of Inter-agency seminars on the theme of "Risk & Resilience" at Gloucestershire University on the subject of Young Runaways. A presentation was delivered on the Astra Project & the services they provide. This incorporated a power- point presentation and video extracts of young people and their parents, which, expressed their views on the service they received and how things had improved within the family. A range of professionals from varying disciplines attended and the feedback from the seminar was very positive.

www.astraproject.org.uk

The Astra website www.astraproject.org.uk is managed by Jonathan Pollinger of Vertex Cheltenham who provides monthly information about activity on the site. Over the last twelve months the website has received approximately 2000 hits per month equating to over 20,000 a year.

The website is accessed from around the world and the top 6 Countries looking at it last year are United Kingdom, Germany, United States of America, Australia, Singapore and the Netherlands. There were also visitors to the site from South Korea, Lithuania, Taiwan, China, Western Europe (unspecified) and Cambodia.

ONLINE PARENTS FORUM

The Astra Project will be launching its online parent forum this autumn, as an additional resource to the website. Parents can discuss varying issues with others in similar situations. The size of the geographical area covered by Astra makes it difficult for parents to meet face to face. It is hoped that the discussion forum will enable them to communicate and discuss common issues, and also be able to link up with parents throughout the country (and even the world).

FUTURE DEVELOPMENTS

Peer Educators

Over the next 12 months the Astra Project is going to explore the opportunity to work with some current and ex runaways to develop a peer education group. We aim to deliver work initially within youth centres across the county and, dependent on the evaluation and outcomes, look to expand this to pilot with a few secondary schools within the district.

SPECIAL ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Brian Parker

The Astra Project Steering Group & staff team would like to take this opportunity to extend our heartfelt thanks and appreciation for all the commitment, effort and support that Brian has given

to the Astra Project over the last 8 years. We wish you a very happy retirement.

Jim Twigg

The staff team would like to acknowledge the valuable contribution made to the project by Jim, who sadly lost his battle with cancer in January 2006. His enthusiasm for the work inspired all those who worked with him.

His influence on the project has had a lasting effect and he will be sadly missed.

Thanks

There are a huge number of individuals and agencies that have supported the development of the ASTRA Project, from the initial pilot commencing in 1997 through to the present day. Without their help, the Project could not have grown to become a countywide resource offering advice, information and support for young runaways and their parents/ careers and to be so highly regarded in the national arena. There is insufficient room to mention all these people by name, but there are some whose particular contribution has been of enormous value and whom we would like to acknowledge here:

ASTRA Project Steering Committee

Gloucestershire Youth Service

Gloucestershire Social Services

Gloucestershire Constabulary

The Railway Children

Stroud District Council

Runaway Helpline

Young Gloucestershire

Vertex Cheltenham

The Police Property Act fund

The Children's Society

We would like to extend our particular thanks to The Railway Children, without whose funding and support the Cheltenham and family support Service could not have been developed. In addition, a big thank you to the Runaway Helpline who support Astra by providing an out of hours service for young runaways across the county of Gloucestershire.





ASTRA

Chequers Bridge Youth & Community Centre,
Painswick Road,
Gloucester
Tel: 01452 541599